

SHIFTING GEARS

THE CHANGING MEANING OF WORK IN MASSACHUSETTS, 1920-1980

GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS

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INTERVIEWER: Martha Norkunas

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SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE OF THREE

MN: Ah, maybe you could tell me a little bit about your family. How it is that they happened to come to Gardner.

RP: How it is, ah, how my family come to Gardner? Well my, my wife was born in Gardner. She was here all her life.

MN: Oh.

RP: But I wasn't. I was born in Aimsbury.

MN: Aimsbury?

RP: Aimsbury, Mass. Yeah. And my, my real father was killed in an, in an industrial accident. Let, leaving my mother with four children. She eventually remarried, and the man she remarried was a, came from Winchendon. And at that time, work was pretty scarce. This is depression years you're talking about. Ah, so he had, ah, he had been working, I can remember he, he was working for a coal company in Aimsbury, and they would work for weeks, and weeks without a pay check. On a promise that someday that the company would be ah, able to pay them off. But, they never got, they just weren't getting their pay so he finally had to go and find something that he had a pay check. So there was, he had a chance to get a job at the Heywood Farms. This isn't in Heywood. Where the college is today? My dad plowed those fields behind a team of horses. Many times. Both sides. One side where the golf course is now, that was all Heywood Farm. All the way down to where the radio station is. And then, course all that side from the ah, nursing home all the way down to Kelton Street. That was all Heywood Farm. One year they'd

RP: plant corn on one side of the road, and hay and alfalfa on the other side, and they would alternate the next year with the corn on the other side, and the hay and alfalfa on this side.

MN: Was the road there?

RP: No, the road, the road that was there then, you know, you know that road that goes down near the field where the soccer field is? And then you make a sharp left, and then you go a ways up to where the road where you go to the golf course? Then you make a sharp right. Well, that 140 can go straight across like it does now. You have to come down and make those two sharp turns. And we lived in that, there was a house right on that turn. Right on that corner. Ah, where the golf course road is. Only on this side. It's gone today, but, we lived in that house there.

MN: Was it a Heywood house?

RP: That one wasn't a Hewood house. But the Heywood Farm ah, on the Heywood Farm we, we lived there when we first came to Gardner. And then we, then we moved into a Heywood house cause they had, they had one house that was a duplex house on the same side where the far, ah, it's set right about where the, right about where the track, where the race track is today on the, up this end a bit. And a ah, we lived there for a while. Then we, then their was, they also had a house there was three houses where the radio station sits. There were two apartment houses, and we lived in the upstairs apartment of that house for a while. So we lived there three, (laughs) ther was a lot of houses. We lived in three houses right there in that area.

MN: And your father was working at the farm the whole time.

RP: Yup. He was working on the farm, he would work a whole week for eight dollars a week and his milk. All week behind a team of horses.

MN: Did he know anything about farming?

RP: Oh yeah. He was a, he was a, he knew horses. He'd ah, been around horses a lot. He knew horses. He worked on a team of horses out in the field. And his, his horses had harness with all these brass decorations on the harness, you know, I don't know if you ever seen them they, they start with a big, brass button then they keep, the buttons keep getting smaller and smaller as they go down the harness.

RP: He'd bring that harness home every weekend and polish it. Just to work out in the fields. So proud of his horses. Yeah, that was, we think we had it tough, but, you know eight dollars a week, and you're trying to raise a family, and free milk. It's no picnic.

MN: And did your mother stay home, or did she work on the farm too?

RP: Yeah, my mother, my mother had the four kids at home. You didn't have babysitters or nothing at that time. That house we lived in, you had no running water. You pumped a pump, a hand pump to get water, and to go to the bathroom you had to go outdoors to an outhouse. In the backyard.

MN: It was cold in the winter wasn't it?

RP: Just a little. That bedroom that I slept in, was, talk about cold! That house that was lived on, on the corner there, the kitchen set here, and we had a big dining room, and there was a big parlor, and way down at the end of the parlor there was a door that went into the front hall that went upstairs. My bedroom was upstairs. Ah, the only heat we had was the kitchen stove. And they'd keep the doors closed to keep the kitchen warm that's, you could only keep one room warm. So when you undressed to go to bed at night, you undressed in the kitchen. Then you ran to those rooms, (laughs) and jumped in that bed.

MN: But did you share a room with your brothers or sisters?

RP: Ah, no, no I, cause at that time we were just the four of us. And that was what, with my original father. My mother was a widow with four children. So, we were just the four of us. They eventually had two more.... with this father. But there were just the four of us then, and I was the only boy, so I had a room alone.

MN: But when you moved to Gardner was after your mother had remarried, right?

RP: Yeah, yeah. So we moved to Gardner and,

MN: And how old were you?

RP: Oh, good lord, I don't, I don't, ah lets see, I don't. Well I went into the third grade, so six, seven, eight, nine, ten or eleven. Something like that. Right around there.

MN: So you remember your real father too?

RP: Not too well. Very, very vaguely. I, I, I remember a little of him, but very, very little. Cause he had got killed. Ah, my mother was a widow for quite a few years all by herself. I remember her ah, working, she worked in a bakery down near Aimsbury to support us for a long time. So I was really pretty young. I vaguely, vaguely remember my real father.

MN: What kind of industry did he work in?

RP: It was ah, it some kind of brass factory. It was a brass factory down there in Aimsbury. The ah, something about he was rolling a keg of brass up on a truck, they used to use a couple of boards to roll it up in, and the thing rolled down on him and crushed him. Crushed his chest. But I was too young to remember any of that.

MN: Yeah, Rosy St. Jean's father died when he was a little boy in an industrial accident.

RP: Oh yeah?

MN: Yeah. I mean, I guess a lot of men lost their lives in such things.

RP: Wow. You know back in the old days, you know, used to do some pretty crude things. You didn't have fork lifts and all kinds of things that you have today to do the lifting. Everything was muscle work.

MN: And when, when you were here on the farm, did you do any of the farm work?

RP: Myself,

MN: Or your sisters?

RP: No, no we, we didn't actually have a farm. We just, we just lived in that house and my dad worked on the farm.

MN: But would you get involved with his,

RP: No, not really. Not really. The only thing I used to, I used to have to go over and get the milk. I'll always remember that. They had a big, black dog that was a terror. Ah, he'd come charging, and of course I always was afraid of dogs anyway. When I was small, I was always afraid of them. I remember one day I'm walking out of there with the bottles of milk in my hand, and that big, black dog came charging at me with his teeth, they looked, they looked real big, you know? (laughs) Charging at me, I, I swung that quart of milk and hit him with that (laughs)

RP: quart of milk. But he really wasn't that vicious. He'd just come, he'd come charging at ya, barking like mad but, scare you to death. Scared me anyway.

MN: Well you didn't have to get up and milk the cows or anything?

RP: Oh no, no, no. No we ah, we didn't do any of that. We used to play in the corn fields. If we'd get lost, they had those, they used to raise, that corn that they'd raise was cow corn, you know. So that stuff used to get big, it was, you know that stuff would be as tall as this room. And when you're a little kid, that corn is way over your head. We'd go out in those corn fields and you could play hide-and-go-seek in the corn fields and you'd get lost. Cause it, you figure when the, that whole section like from Kelton Street all the way to the nursing home, and from the road all the way back to the woods. That was all corn. You could go, you could do a lot of travelling in there and the other guy could never find you.

MN: Were there other kids around to play with?

RP: Oh yeah. There was neighbors around. There was neighbors around. Where the golf course stands today, that used to be Lovejoy's farm.

MN: Oh, another farm?

RP: Yeah, that was a farm ah, the Lovejoy's. It burnt, the barn, the barn burnt to the ground and they lost, I forget how much cattle. A lot of cattle, a lot of horses. The ponies. The kids ponies. Ah, we were living at the, the morning that burned, we were living where the radio station sits. In that house that was there. And, we could see that thing burning down, burning. Really it was a big fire, of course with the equipment they had then, it took forever to get up there. By the time they got up there, they, they saved the house. The house was attached to a barn with a like a big breezeway. Closed in breezeway. They saved the house. The house today is a clubhouse. What they use for a clubhouse, that was Lovejoy's house. Been in that house many, many times.

MN: And were there other farms around too?

RP: Oh yeah, there were, there,

MN: They must have been smaller than the Heywood Farm, right?

RP: Yeah, they were all, they were smaller farms. Witakinens had a farm, had a

RP: farm up, the Winekienens farmed for a lot of years up, that's up where that road going to where the court house is today. You go further up that road, up in there. Yeah, we had

MN: Well, why would you walk to school?

RP: School?

MN: Yeah, did you go to school?

RP: We bussed to school. We, we were bussed but not bus, we had horse-drawn vehicles. We went to school. My dad, my step-father drove the, we used to call it a barge. It was like, like a chicken coop on sleighs for the winter time. Looked just like a chicken coop because it was like a little swallow house, had some little windows on the top, and it had a bench, running on the whole length of each side.

MN: And it closed in?

RP: It was all closed in. They protect it from the wheather, that I get to school. So my, my step-father would go all around those back streets up around the, all that whole section. Pick up all the kids that were going to school, and bring em, down to the school.

MN: (laughs)

RP: In the winter time it was a, a vehicle on wheels. I mean in the summer time. Strange.

MN: Still drawn by a horse.

RP: Still drawn by a horse. I

MN: And that was part of his job?

RP: I thank George. George Heywood, the one that comes to our meeting once in a while, ah, he, he was in my old, I have a sister two years older than me. And he was in her class in school. John Heywood, his younger brother, was in my class in school. So we rode the same bus. They used to ride the same barge to school with us too.

MN: So there was no difference between the people who worked in the farm and the Heywood kids?

RP: Oh no. They, they rode with us. They, the Heywood boys rode with us and the

RP: in fact the, their father, Mr. Heywood, their father, we the cows would have births, he was, he would do the_mid-wifing chores. He was, he'd get right in there with the rest of em. Take care of the cows.

MN: Would you visit the um, Heywood kids at their house, too?

RP: No. No, they were, they were a different class. They were upper class. We were lower class people.

MN: So they might ride to school with you, but that's where it stops.

RP: Yeah, that's right.

MN: So would they play hide-and-seek, and those kinds of games?

RP: Oh no. They didn't play in the corn fields. The ones that played in the corn fields were the neighbors around.

MN: That's funny, they were probably dying to play there.

RP: Yeah, you don't see that anymore.

MN: And then how long did you live at the farm?

RP: Well, lets see. I stayed, you know this is a strange thing. I came from Aimsbury, I went into the third grade in the middle of the year. At School Street School. Strange the way things happen. My oldest son married a Landry girl, so naturally her name was Mrs. Pelletier. She was a school teacher. The class that she was teaching for her first teaching job was that same third grade at Elm Street, at ah, School Street School. Now, as time went on a little, my youngest son went to teacher's college, and he became a school teacher. (phone rings) She'll get that. And the first teaching job he had was he replaced Mrs. Pelletier. (Martha laughs) So this kid found it kind of strange he came in in the middle of the year because she ah, I forget why she left, but she quit teaching anyway, and she left. They, in the middle of the year, there, there teacher was Mrs. Pelletier. And now comes a guy, his name is Mr. Pelletier. But he's not her husband. (Martha laughs) And for third graders, it was kind of hard to grasp. Some of em couldn't figure that out.

MN: That's cute. (both laughing)

RP: Yeah.

MN: So what were you saying, that, how long did you stay on the farm for?

RP: Then I, then we were, ah, I was fourth, I went to fourth, fourth or fifth grade at, at the ah, on Elm Street. The so-called condemned building now. And ah, fifth grade, in fifth grade I moved to Winchinton. That, at that, that was when my, my step-father got a job with Davenport in Winchinton. We were finally making something. A little better money now then that, that, the farm didn't pay no money at all.

MN: Was the farm still running when you moved?

RP: Yeah, it was still going then. So we, he got that job in Winchinton, so we moved to Winchinton.

MN: And what, what, what Davenport?

RP: Davenport. Cold on ice. They used to cut ice on the pond up there. I remember them cutting ice. We used to skate there. They'd cut a big square out of that ice you know, from that big pond up there in Winchinton? Then of course once it start freezing over, you know, it was a different color than the rest of the ice. So us kids would start skating there, you know be smart aeks, we'd start cutting the corner of the new ice. And the bravest one would cut it a little further, you know? If I saw my kids doing that today, I'd ^{rown} drown em.

MN: (laughing) Oh, just to dare it?

RP: Yeah, just to dare it, we, we'd be skating around the sides you know, and then you'd cut across, cut the, just cut the corner off, of the new, that was the new ice, you know? We'd cut across like that, then the next kid would cut across like this. Then the really brave one, after one cut right across, he'd go all the way. Cause you didn't know if it was strong enough to hold you or not. You know? Just hoping it ^{would} would.

MN: And what was it, cold too?

RP: Oh, it would be cold.

MN: Nō, but ^{Coal & Ice} Colen Ice Company, is that what called (Coal & Ice) L.D.

RP: ^{Coal} Colen Ice. They sold coal, where there was, there was no oil there. There were no oil being sold as fuel. It was strickly coal and ice in the winter, in the summertime people had to have ice in their ice-boxes. That step-father of mine was

RP: rugged. I, I've seen that man, I've seen that man take a hundred pound cake of ice on those tongs, you know they carry the ice with, take a hundred pound, one in each hand and run up the stairs, the port steps with it. Delivering it. Rugged. He was a real, (chuckles) real rugged guy.

MN: Oh you were, were you the only boy, when he had other children was (?)

RP: Well they, now after we, after we moved to Winch^unton they had a boy and a girl. So I have a step-brother, I have a step-sister.

MN: But they'd be a lot younger.

RP: Their, yeah their quite a bit younger than, the step-sister now is, well she works full-time at the Fernal School, but she also sells real estate up there in Ringe, New Hampshire. And my brother, step-brother ^{is out in} lives out in Chigago. He's got a good job. Big bank. Biggest bank in the country.

MN: Did your own sister stay around this area?

RP: Ah, I have one in Winch^unton that my, and ah, one in Chicago, now one is in Florida now, but she was, the one in Florida they just moved, they just built down in Florida a couple years ago ^{when} and he retired. He was a, he was a bowler. In fact he was world champion bowler three times. State champion many times. While they were living in Aimsbury, he owned a bowling alley. Him and Bowl^{more}bor Company really got along together cause he was one of the first bowlers ever on television. The company liked him. He was good, so they backed him to build his bowling alleys down there on route 110, in Aimsbury. Ah, he did pretty well, with bowling. We got that one in Winch^unton, one in Chigago, one in Ringe, and that one in Florida. Those are my real sisters. And the brother is in Chicago too.

MN: Did you play sports, or did your father encourage you to

RP: No, I never, I always wanted to be in sports but I never was because of the polio I had. I had polio when I was a year old.

MN: Oh, I didn't know that.

RP: Yeah. _____ (?) last week at the shop, I fell and hurt this knee.

MN: My brother has polio. He got it when he was two. In his leg also.

RP: I had mine at one year, so, don't know anything else.

MN: Is that the nine, when were you born?

RP: Twenty-one.

MN: Oh, so he got his in the early forties. So about five years before they come out with the vaccine.

RP: Yeah, see back when I had mine, the treatment then I they put the leg in a cast. It mobilized it. I was in, my mother tells me that I had that leg in a cast for a whole year at Boston Hospital.

MN: And now they think that's the worst thing you can do.

RP: Yeah, that's, they find out now that they never should have done that, you know?

MN: ^{Oh}You had to go to a Boston Hospital when you were just one years old?

RP: Yeah, ^{oh}oh yeah.

MN: And how could your mother ever get down to Boston all the time to see you?

RP: Ah, I don't really know. I, I don't really know how she ever did it. Ah, friends and relatives I guess, ah, more or less depended on. She never had a car, she never drove a car. So,

MN: But you don't have on a brace, do you?

RP: No, not now. But, I think after this Dr. Tracy's treating me right now for this fall I just took. This knee here, he's talking about, I should get something to support that knee.

MN: But growing up did you have to have a brace?

RP: No. No I didn't.

MN: Cause Billy, my brother wears

RP: But I,

MN: a whole leg brace, even today.

RP: Oh yeah?

MN: His whole life.

RP: No I didn't, I managed to get along without it.

MN: Oh that was lucky.

RP: Took a lot of tumbles, but (chuckles) lot of bruises.

MN: And then, do you remember, when you were in Winchenton, you probably went to

MN: High school there?

RP: Yup, the class of "39".

MN: Do you remember that your family encouraged you to do or not to do any particular thing?

RP: I, I got no encouragment at all from my family. The only encouragement I got from my family was to (phone rings) go to work as soon as possible to bring some money in, and that's why I, I actually dropped out second year of

MN: Say, I'm sorry, the phone, say that again, they encouraged you to do what? to go to work?

RP: To go to work, and as soon as possible, to bring into the farm, to the house, you know. So I only went two years of high school, and I dropped out. I went to work. I worked at the factory. Mason-Parkers in Winchendon.

MN: What do they make?

RP: Toys. They were Toy-town, that's the reason they were called Toy-town. They, they were a big manufacturer of toys in there, in Winchendon. In fact, I was just reading some old stuff here, ah, on Converse in Winchendon. They were the biggest toy maker in the world at that time. That plant, it ended up being Murray's Furniture Factory but, the building was Converse Toys, back then.

MN: And, were they wooden toys?

RP: Mostly, mostly all wooden. Few parts were metal, but there was mostly wooden stuff.

MN: Were there other young guys your age in the factory?

RP: Oh yeah. Sure. Then I went down, where I worked, down from Mason and Parker, there was, down in the gully down there, and, started over there for 25¢ an hour. Worked 40 hour week, you get a 10 dollar bill. (phone rings)

MN: You're popular this morning.

RP: Oh, it's her. It's her. She does alterations, you know.

MN: Oh that's neat.

RP: And, oh she's so busy, and people are, cause she does nice work. She's so busy it's awful. I tell her, I says, tell some of them you can't do it. That all, you can't. She hates to turn anybody down, you know.

MN: What were you saying, so other kids obviously left high school to work also.

RP: Oh, yeah, earlier than that at 12 years old I started cadding at Toy-Town. Of course, Toy Town, what we called Toy-Town Tavern used to be a Treadway Inn, which was where the golf course is today, where the school is up there, what they call the Winchendon School. That was a Treadway Inn back then.

MN: What is Treadway Inn?

RP: The Inn was, an Inn for wealthy people. there was a lot of wealthy people that used to come to that country club there. It was a very nice country club back in those days and it was strickly for well to do people. I use to caddy up there, course there was no golf carts in those days you know. If a guy wanted to play golf, and he was to lazy to carry his clubs, he hired a caddy, and most of them guys hired caddies. So, I started caddy work when I was 12 years old.

MN: After school?

RP: Yea, after school, and weekends, and, ah, something they won't do today. Back then, if there was a tournament going on up at the Tavern and they did not have enough caddies, they would come down to the High School and the High School would let us off to go up and caddy because we could earn some money. It seems that earning a little money was more important than being sure of your education. Today, they wouldn't do that. Your education comes first. But back then, you know, earning a few bucks was more important than the education. Times change.

MN: Boy that's a surprise.

RP: Yup, times change.

MN: And so, did you do that until you left high school?

RP: I did that, I did that right up until I got that job up at Mason-Parker's. Once I started working at Mason-Parker's, that was a full job, and then working there for 25¢ an hour, when we, 1939 when I went down to Heywoods, they hired the three of us. We was just going by there one day. The three of us had the afternoon off, we were driving by and the employment door was open, so we decided, lets go in for the heck of it, and they hired the three of us for 44¢ an hour. You know, you were allmost doubling your wages. We thought that was terrific. So, thats howcome we started working there at Heywood Wakefield. We tried it for a couple of weeks, a couple of weeks turned into 40 years. (laugh) We were only going to stay there a couple of weeks you know.

MN: And you had the friends at the toy place for about two years before Heywood's?

RP: Ya, the toy place I worked for a couple of years there, then we went into Heywoods.

MN: And you really only thought you would be there a few weeks?

RP: Ya. Well, that was the plan. The three of us, you know, were three guys out joyriding that afternoon cause we didn't have any work at Mason-Parkers, we stopped in there and they hired all three of us.

MN: Did the other guys last 40 years also.

RP: Nope, I was the only guy that lasted 40 years, ahh two of them, well both of them went into the service, which I didn't, so, and after, the service, I don't know what happened to them. They never did come back. I was the only one of the three. They probably found better jobs.

MN: And, did you still live at home?

RP: I was still living at home then. I was traveling from Winchendon down every day. I was riding with another person. That was for two years then I got married in 1941, which was two years later. I was twenty years old when I got married. Young Kids.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B

MN: You were only twenty when you got married?

RP: Yup. We were both twenty. We got married in 1941. So then I moved to Gardner. We rented an apartment.

MN: How did you find your wife?

RP: How did I find my wife? We, We, well we used to both go roller skating at the same place, down where the Gardner, the old Gardner (? Fairgrounds) is, you probably don't even know where that is, as you're going down 140, after you go down that long hill and you come to where 140 comes this way, now on the main highway, that's all the way across route 2, after you go by that stop sign there, you keep going a little ways, you'll see the remains of an old racetrack on your right, that used to be a country fair grounds, used to have country fairs, big country fairs there. The fair grounds was there. They had buildings for horses, all the equipment for all kinds of sulky races, horses races.

MN: All kinds of what races?

RP: Sulky races, horses, guy sits in a sulky behind the horse, it's a two wheeler,

MN: Oh, that's what you call it?

RP: That's a sulky, its a two wheel vehicle. They still have them today in some places, they have them races.

MN: And, they had them here in Gardner?

RP: They had them here in Gardner, sure. But we actually met at :

RP:(con't) the, we used to go skating at the same place, but we actually met at the Dime dances in Winchendon. Winchendon, where the Clark Memorial is today, in that, where there is a parking lot of to the side of Clark Memorial, there was a building there, Winchendon Boys Club, it was a two floor affair (laugh), a basketball floor on the second floor and we used to have dances up there with a disc jockey. We paid 10¢ to go to the dance. And that was more fun, there was more people enjoyed that than the best dance you can hold today anywhere around, and you don't believe that, you can just talk to anybody that lived around that area at that time, even the Gardner area. All the Gardner people used to come there, just to go to the Winchendon dance. You paid 10¢ and you had a good time all night. And there was no booze sold, nothing sold there, all you did was dance to records (laugh). When they played a fast number, you could stand on the side and you could actually see the floor go five or six inches in the middle of the floor, it was so old. They had all this money, the Clark Memorial money fund had already been set up way back years, years back, but he didn't, he wanted it, he didn't want the money to be used until the interest had built up to , so that they would never have to use the capital, just the interest, and that's when they finally built the Clark Memorial, when the interest got high enough. So that principal will always, still be there, that fund.

MN: What are they using the money for today?

RP: Well, they are still using it for maintaining the Clark Memorial, they still have to, everything is getting so high now that they have to even raise other money now to keep the Clark Memorial going, you know, it's an expensive proposition today.

MN: Do you remember what kind of dances you did?

RP: Back then, we did all kinds of dances. We did, we use to do everything, the big apple, we use to do the jive, we use to do the shag, oh, we did them all, that was part of the fun of the thing, everybody learning the new dances, trying to show off to the others that you knew how to do them.

MN: How would you learn them, I mean people didn't watch TV?

RP: Well, like my buddy and I, we use to go to all the dances around, for miles, anywhere within hitch-hiking distance, we use to go.

MN: So you would hitch-hike to the dance?

RP: Oh sure. We never had a car. Very few people in the crowd had a car. You hitch-hiked. We used to hitch-hike to dances. One week we would go to eight dances in one week.

MN: Oh, so it wasn't just the weekend?

RP: If there was a dance, there use to be the Arcadia here in Gardner. Big bands use to come there. We've danced to Tommy Dorsey, ah, Glen Miller, ah, all the big bands came to that Arcadia, and to this day, I am still trying to figure out how we could ever afford to pay a band like that to come to that little Arcadia, which probably didn't hold, probably didn't hold more than a hundred people.

MN: Is that still there? The Arcadia?

RP: It's a shop now. It's in south Gardner. Way out in the back. All you gotta do, is when your down there in the South Gardner area, ask someone where the old Arcadia is, they'll show you. And then, there was another one, open air ballroom, this was just for summertime dancing. The walls, they use to let the walls would fall down on hinges, and there was like a big walkway all around the sides and inside was the dancefloor, and that was the fairway, and that was right where, you know, where you turn to go to the airport, well as soon as you turn on that road to go to the airport, right on the right hand,

MN: Where the Lithiwanian Club is?

RP: There is a building there now. It's, I don't know what that building is today. It's not the same building. It set right there on that corner. That used to be a lot of fun. That was a fun place. Used to go down there, and thats how come we went to eight dances in one week, because a dance is four hours, and there was a dance somewhere in the area Winchendon, Athol, Fitchburg, down there at the Arcadia, from eight to twelve, it was a holliday weekend, we had a dance at the Arcadia, then they had a midnight dance at the Fairway, so we went from the Arcadia at 12:00 down to the Fairway, and four more hours down there.

MN: Oh, my God.

RP: We used to do a lot of dancing (laugh)

MN: So you would just watch the other people and copy them?

RP: We danced, well we danced with some of the girls that knew these new dances, we'd bring them back to Winchendon, the dances back to Winchendon, not the girls (laugh)

MN: I was wondering,

RP: Ya

MN: So that is how you met people probably?

RP: Oh, ya. dime dance in Winchendon is where my wife used to come up, they used to come up with a whole, they had a van like, with a lot of seats in it, her brother used to drive that van and they would come up a whole van full to the Winchendon dance.

MN: All Girls?

RP: No, both, some guys, a few guys, some girls, mostly girls.

MN: Where did she come from? Oh, Gardner, that's right.

RP: She lived right here on Parker St. That's where she lived when I met her. She lived right up here beyond the Arcadian Club in that three decker.

MN: Your background isn't french is it?

RP: Ya, Ya.

MN: Do you speak french?

RP: When I left Amsbury, and went into the third grade in Gardner, in the middle of the class year, the teacher wanted to put me back in the second grade because I couldn't talk English good enough. I was all French because we went to convents in Amsbury, but we had nuns at the convent and I refused to be any part of going back in the second grade and it's a good thing I stood up for it because it didn't take me no time, I picked it up at and now it's just the opposite, my french is terrible.

MN: Does your wife speak french?

RP: My wife speaks it very good, she's very fluent in french, she knows french very well.

MN: But you didn't speak it at home, you and she?

RP: No, because I wasn't that good, but she can, even today, her aunt, she has an aunt in the nursing home, Eastwood Pines that doesn't really talk English yet, hardly at all, and she's the only relative she's got left, so she visits, she takes care of all her business and this is where they talk french all the time.

MN: Do your kids know french?

RP: No. None of my kids ever took french. I'm going to have one, a granddaughter, she is taking it in college, that's why she's gonna talk french. She's going to be one heck of a journalist. She took journalism and creative writing in college. She just graduated right now. She's gonna be real good, and she's taken french cause her family is french. They are Bresnahan's and that's french. Her father's the lawyer down there. Ya, he was a city counselor for about 12 or 16 years, down in New Bedford. He's now, he's also the, he gave up the, nobody could ever beat him, the family is so well known, him down there is like the Kennedy's, you know, you just can't beat him, so he finally got sick of it and he quit, but now he is the city's legal attorney (laugh) that's just part time you know (laugh)

MN: But they are not Portugese obviously?

RP: No, No. Well most of New Bedford is Portugese, but they are French, very French. In fact, the brother and sister, their brothers and sisters they all talk french.

MN: French Canadian?

RP: Ya, they all talk it. Very fluently.

MN: I can understand the french from France, but this canadian?

RP: Well, this grand-daughter, she, as part of her school, her last two years, she study, they sent her over to the Netherlands, she was in the schools, the school in Boston owns a castle in the Netherlands and they made it into dormitories and every year they send, they have a, as long as the parents can afford to send them, (laugh) they have about 20 or 40 kids that they send over for a good part of the year and she's been over there two years. Her last two years, so she's got a lot of, she's traveled all over Europe.

MN: Did you ever go to Europe?

RP: No, I didn't.

MN: Do you want to?

RP: I would like to but a, the way the world is going, I don't know, your safer just staying home now.

MN: What do you do on your vacation?

RP: Me? Oh, we travel around. For one thing, My wife won't fly. Last fall all my sisters and brothers, all married naturally, their husbands and wives, they all got together to go to Hawaii. They were all meeting at the airport in Chicago, and they all went except us. My wife wouldn't get on that plane, if you gave her the airplane (laugh).

MN: She has never been on one.

RP: No. She just won't go. She won't go on an airplane, she won't go on a boat, so,,

MN: Can't get to far.

RP: We won't get to Hawaii (laugh)

MN: Unless you're a good swimmer.

RP: Unless we start building a tunnel (laugh).

MN: Could you tell me when you started at Heywood Wakefield, what you did? What it was like? Do you remember what you were thinking then?

RP: Well, like I say, I started in 1939, and course going from 25¢ an hour to 44¢ an hour I thought that was a terrific jump in pay and I started in the cabinet room. The cabinet room department hand sanding. That was a tough job, there wasn't too much machinery and you did most of this with a piece of sandpaper wrapped around a block of wood and you keep grinding. It was hard.

MN: What would you be sanding?

RP: Everything, all the furniture. Case goods. We were making mostly case goods, you know like, you take a thing like that, today that edge is all rounded off with sandpaper. It's all done by machinery now. Back then, all you had was the, knife would make the round, but you had to sand all those knife marks out, and smooth it all up. You had to sand everything down to make it look nice, to take a finish, you know,.

MN: It was still, the process was still chopped up in pieces, in other words you would sand all day. It just wasn't so mechanized.

RP: Right. You had to do most of the finish work to finely finish it before it got into the paint shop. It was all done by hand. We use to have quite a big crew of hand sanders.

MN: And would that be what you would do the whole day, would be the sanding?

RP: You did that same thing all day long. Until the fingers would wear out (laugh). The tips of your fingers would get all worn from handling the sandpaper, you know. After a while, we started taping up our fingers. Before that, you didn't have, the company didn't even furnish you gloves. Today, if you went into a place like that and did hand sanding, the company would furnish gloves and all kinds of equipment.

MN: Did you choose to go there, or did they put you there?

RP: No, they placed you there. That was the job that they hired you for. That's what, you didn't get a, this is what you hired for, you want it. Yes or no. Yes, okay, you take it.

MN: Did you have to have experience to get it?

RP: Not really. It wasn't that kind of a job. It was anybody could do at the time. Then I moved on into the cabinet, through the course of this you would learn what the cabinet makers would be doing and when nobody came along you got a chance to bid on the job, before they hired a new guy, the new guy, would take the job handsanding and you moved into the assembling part of it where of course, were the better jobs that paid better money.

MN: What do you mean, Bid on it?

RP: Well, you have, as you progressed, then course by now the union had moved in. You know once the union had moved in, then you, the people, if there was an opening in the department. Say a guy, there was an opening for a fitting drawers, or hanging doors or that kind of thing in case goods, they had to post that job on the clock, on the time clock, in the department first before they could go outside of the department. Now if anybody in the department wanted that job, you signed your name. That was your bid for that job. So if you bid on the job then they had to give it to the highest seniority in that department. They would hire a new man to take the place of what you were leaving. You would work your way on through the better paying jobs like that, until you get to the better, well after a while there was a limit as to where you could go. There was piece work then so you just increased your earnings by increasing your production.

MN: Couldn't you move from being a plant worker to management and increase your earnings?

RP: I did. Thats what I did. I eventually, after 30 years working on the the bench, course the war came along, and that changed everything. We were, we had to, we went into all kinds of war goods, so I learned welding jobs. I became pretty good at welding. I was doing all kinds of welding. And, then, when the war ended, we had to all shift back over to our old stuff that we use to make. It was quite a long change in there. But after 30 years of doing that stuff, I finally got the job as supervisor in the chair assembly and table assembly department. So the last ten years I worked at Heywoods, thats what I was, I was supervisor in the assembly department.

MN: The supervisor is over the foreman?

RP: Well, its the same thing, some places call them the supervisors, some call then foreman.

MN: Did you care if you were a foreman earlier? Is it something you wanted to do?

RP: Ya, Ya, because you got away (laugh) from the hassle of rushing, being piecework, you know, having to do so many pieces all the time. When you were piecework all the time, you could almost tell what time of the day it was by how many pieces you had done, you know, because you get in that rut you know how much you had done by 8:00 by 10:00 o'clock, so you could almost tell time by what you had done.

MN: Did that change your relationship with the people you worked with, when you got to be their boss?

RP: Not really in my case. Because I think thats why the people that worked for me kind of appreciated me because they knew that I done the same thing that they did. I tried. I never tried, I always treated the people that worked for me the way I would like to be treated when I was doing their job. You know, I always tried to be fair, consequently, I was. I was well liked in that respect.

MN: Sometimes you have to call the shots don't you?

RP: Yaa, but you can still, sometimes somethings get a little tough but I think the guys, when you really have to call them down on something, they know that there is a reason for it, so they gotta go along with it. As long as you don't try to be a wise guy and a I know it all guy, you know. If you don't try to be like, put across that you know it all. Most guys are pretty good like that. Plus today, I don't know, today its a whole different world out there.

MN: You know, people say that, and I'm curious?

RP: I don't know, I don't know if the relationship now between worker and boss, I think its different. Everybody has the impression that the boss is out to get you all the time, and the same vice-versa, ya know. The boss feels that the worker is tryna stick it to him all the time. That didn't seem to be the case back when I was foreman.

MN: Do you know wen, or why that started to change?

RP: No. When or why I don't know. I don't know, I think, of course after the war then I think, after Kennedy's assanation people started to change then. To this day, I still don't think Kennedy assasination was what was thrown at us. There was a lot there that we don't know. Maybe someday it will come out, but I don't know.

MN: I agree with you. Its to simple that some guy gets a gun and just does it.

RP: Thats right. In my own opinion, I think that you will find that Johnson knew all about it before it happened. But, maybe not. I maybe all wet, but I allways thought that Johnson must have known something was gonna happen that would make him president. That's why today, if Jackson, might have made a fairly decent president, but you know that if he had been elected - -He would have been dead.

MN: Jesse Jackson?

RP: Ya. Dead in no time.

MN: Just because he's black?

RP: Right. Sure.

MN: Maybe we'll get a black president with a woman vice president?

RP: I believe, that if Dukakis had picked Jackson for his running mate, Dukakis wouldn't a lasted long, because I'm sure that there would have been some body black out there, that would have said, Hey, I can make Jackson president. Some nutty black would have said I can make Jackson president by knocking off Dukakis. and it would have happened. I think that would have had a lot to do with Dukakis not picking Jackson.

MN: Maybe, that is why Bush picked Quale. (laugh, laugh)

RP: (laugh) Well I don't know, I don't think I want to run for any of those jobs.

MN: Me neither. (laugh) But maybe thats true. Maybe when these big ruptures happen, people change there attitudes.

RP: I think so. I think, I think it has to have a bearing on people's attitudes somewhere along the line.

MN: And did that, when you became a supervisor did that bring you more in contact with the management then? Were you part of Management?

RP: Yaa. Oh, yaa, definitely a part of management then, once youre well (pause) Well it also makes a big difference in our pension. I worked 30 years, 30 years under the pension plan as a union worker and I worked 10 years under the pension plan as a supervisor, under management. My pension - I get two checks now. The thirty year check is 1/3 of the 10 year check. One thind for three times as many years. So you see, if I had worked the whole 40 years under management, I would have a fairly decent retirement check from heywoods today

MN: Why didn't you apply for management earlier then?

RP: Well, you just couldn't walk up to the door and say I want a job in management. You had to earn it. You had to earn your job in order to get promoted. You had to show that over the years that you know everything there was to know about making furniture. To this day, I could, as far as making furniture, I could make anything I wanted to, any piece of furniture, as long as I had the blueprint and the lumber, a load of lumber.

MN: Do you have a shop in your house? Any tools?

RP: No, I have a little thing down cellar. Couple of saws and I do little. I make a few things for myself, but, if I had to do it, if I had the knowhow to do it. I made samples for Heywood, quite ofter if they were in a hurry for samples for the show, and even now part of my part time job at Nichols & Stone, I have been making samples for them over there.

MN: Is that what you do there?

RP: Right now I'm still working part time. I went over, I left Heywoods when they closed in 1979 and I went to Nichols & Stone and so I 've been with , I worked until, I was 65, which was 5 years, almost 6 years as supervisor in the final, sub-assembly department and final machining.

MN: In case goods or chairs?

RP: Chairs. It was all chairs at Nichols & Stone, but see, the last 10 years at Heywoods I was foreman of the chairs assembly department. Chairs and tables. So, I knew all the chairs, and I knew all the tables. I knew all the pieces. Any furniture I could handle.

MN: How did management treat you differently there, I mean when you were the foreman? Besides the pension.

RP: Well, for one thing a little respect. You get a lot more respect from management when you work out there with the management at Nichols & Stone. While I was with Nichols & Stone, one year Doug Nichols took me to Atlanta Georgia to one of the machinery shows, down to look at all the new products that were out, and if you see something that you like, that you think might be helpful in your department, you'd bring it up to Doug, and if he thought it was going to improve the situation, and they could afford the, of course, being able to afford the equipment was another thing. The products they are making today are very expensive. Very expensive.

MN: The machines?

RP: Yup, very expensive the machines.

MN: So he trusted your advice?

RP: Ya, not only myself, he would bring five or six people, like they had the other plant at the time, it was over in Heywood building. Brewster Manufacturing, Brewster, that belonged to Nichols & Stone. They made the tables and the hutches over there. Now they moved into there new, you've seen there new building, they moved

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course when I go in those two days, course there's a new supervisor now, that took my place, but if they needed, were in a bind for sample in the Brewster part of it, cause the show was coming up down in, these furniture shows you know, all over the country, and the show was coming up in Carolina. They were behind, knowing they weren't going to get the thing they wanted out, so they'd ask me to do down and help them. I worked down there my two days, for a couple of months helping them out. I made samples down there. So we made tables and chairs. We were making some great tables down there, fancy.

MN: When you make a sample, you make the whole chair right? You don't make one special part?

RP: The whole chair, the whole table, whatever, you're makin, you make the whole thing, you yourself.

MN: But you yourself make the whole thing?

RP: Thats right. You make the whole thing right from a blueprint. You have a blueprint. You make the. You figure out what each parts got to look like and make it match. Make it match the blueprint.

MN: So thats how they used to make chairs a hundred years ago, isn't it, that one person made the whole chair?

RP: One person made the whole thing.

MN: I wonder if thats different for one person to make the whole chair or one part of a chair.

RP: Oh, yes, ya, because you take a production worker, a production worker today, does, well lets say for instance he's running a boring machine, boring holes in a piece of wood, to him, it's basically what it is. He bores wholes in a piece of wood. Whereas if he had to make the whole thing he probably wouldn't have the skill to go to the blueprint. For one thing, you have gotta learn how to read the blueprint to start with. You have got to makethe piece from the blueprint so that when you got all the pieces made they all go together to make a chair or a table. Its gotta all fit. Thats a knowledge that you accumulate over a period of years of doing it for yourself.

MN: But I would think that it was a different thing to make a whole chair rather than one part of it. Its not somebody just as happy doing the part that they do rather then,

RP: As long as there making money doing that part, today, you see with mass production the only way you can make a profitable product is mass production. One person would not be able to make all those chairs. It would be impossible. You couldn't do it in time. Cause, you wouldn't be able to get on the machines to do the operations as you went along the line. This way, mass production, you can say, make 10,000 rockers at a time. While to bend a piece with two holes in it, shape it, it goes to the next guy, he drills two holes in it, its all made.

MN: Would most of these guys say they are hole borers. Do most of them know how to make a whole chair anymore?, or know how to different things on the chair.

RP: They do a lot. Well, they might know how to operate a lot of different machines. The man may know how to operate a shaper, he may be able to shape, he may be able to do the boring the holes, ah, he may know how to do a lot of things. He has gotta have a sample piece to go by. See

MN: Not a blueprint, but a chair?

RP: An actual piece. You see, we also have, we got what we call string samples in the shop. A string sample is a piece and in our particular case we spray them orange, give them a shot of orange paint so you know thats the sample piece. There hanging on a string on a rack. If you gotta do an operation on that particular piece, like say, you get those rockers, you gotta bore the holes. You go on the rack and get that sample piece and bring it to your boring machine and you set up the boring machine according to where the holes are in that sample. When it fits in the sample piece, then you bore all your pieces that way. It should be right. So, thats the difference between making the whole chair and making just a part of it.

MN: But, I am wondering if most of these people know a lot about wood-working anyway.

RP: Most of them would, Yes.

MN: They pick it up here and there.

RP: After you've been around it a while, you pick it up, you pick it up and you learn it. Its something that, as you go along you learn a lot of that stuff.

MN: Let's go back for a minute about the dances. After you got married and you started working at Heywoods, did you and your wife still go to the dances?

RP: Oh, yes, Sure we did. We went dancing for a lot of years. You have to, even after we started having children, we still danced for a while. In fact, a, at one point in time, my wife and I, and her brother, thats the same one that used to go to the dances and go to the roller skating rink, and his wife, the four of us, we ran a couples club. We ran that for four years. We had 75 couples. We'd have a dance once a month, on the same saturday of the month, every month. We had the same band for four years. The first year we rented the Eagles Hall, and that got to be to small for us so we moved, I take that back, the first year we rented the Legion, the Legion hall, and then, we moved to the Eagles for the second, third and fourth year. The hall was bigger. We used to decorate the hall. We had a different theme every month. We'd decorate the hall, what ever the theme was, and we'd have different groups that would put on the entertainment the following month, like if we had a table, like they used to sit in clusters, and different groups, and there was a table with eight, ten, twelve people. It was your turn to put the entertainment on next month. You figure out what you want to do and you do it. So they'd have to come up during the month, so like everyone use to say " you have more fun practicing at home" then puting the show on. They would come up with something crazy, but it was always good entertainment. It cost nothing.

MN: They would do it themselves?

RP: They would do it themselves. Put the entertainment on the following month. We ran these dances four years. We charged \$1.00 per person. maybe a \$1.00 a couple. It was cheap. We paid out band \$75.00 and had Freddy Porter's Orchestra from Ashby, four piece orchestra, a good band. Freddy Porter was a real comedian. He died a couple of years ago. Real comedian, himself. He enjoyed playing with us because it was a sure night for him every month, the whole year. We paid nothing for the hall because the club would let us have the hall for free, because there money would come from the take at the bar. They had a bar, course whatever booze they sold, it was theirs.

MN: Where'd you find all the couples to join?

RP: Oh, we had, 75 couples and we had a waiting list. We had the same 75 couples for four years.

MN: Did you put an add in the paper?

RP: Oh no. We never had to advertise, just talking. When the word got around the friends and the ones that used to like dancing, to this day, there still people running to be in. Why don't you start the couples club again. At this age? I tell them you want to start the couples club? You start it. You run it. I'll join, cause they liked it because the four of us did all the work. Well we decorated the hall, you know, we made sure the stuff was bought, buy the tickets, sell the tickets, at the door. I remember one night, we had a dance going on in the winter at the Eagles, everything else in town was closed. Nobody had anything that night. The snow was so bad. Real blizzard. The snow was like that. It was kind'na hard for us to call it off. We had the band coming up. We didn't know what to do. (phone rings) (let it go) nobody shows up, well we still had it. Almost everybody shows up in thier winter clothes, snow-suits slacks, and whatever have you. We left that hall that night, because when we left it was'nt to bad to get there, but after four hours of dancing the snow was finally piling up outside. Snowplows hadn't gone by. We got outside and we had to take turns pushing each others cars out from the parking space to get into the middle of the road. But, laugh, it was a ball.

MN: When was this?

RP: Oh, boy, I don't, good lord this has to be 20 years back or more.

MN: In the early sixties?

RP: Probably the early sixties, somewhere around there. Ya, early sixties. Maybe, late 50's. Somewhere around there.

MN: Did you used to get involved with the Heywood Wakefield Social Club?

RP: Oh, Ya. I was vice president of the social club for a lot of years, a lot of years. I was in with the Heywoods social club. I used to run a lot of the trips. Like, we used to go to a lot of the ball games in Boston, like two busses at a time. Ya, you know, we'd go two buses to the hockey game. In those days you could buy tickets for the Celtics games. You can't today, cause everything is sold in advance of the day. Now you can't get, you can't buy tickets. We'd go to hockey, basketball, baseball, and we would go to different events around like that. I use to run busses.

MN: And, people liked that, didn't they?

RP: They did, well it was a cheap way to go. In fact that was the was we went to the 1939, was it "39", World's Fair in New York. The first year I was working there. Course I wasn't running it then. But, I went with a buss from Heywoods to the Worlds Fair in New York.

MN: You read about that in the shop news?

RP: It it hadn't been for the buss going with the Heywood group, I probably would never have gotten there. I didn't own a car in those days.

MN: Did they also have this social club at Nichols and Stone?

RP: Ya.

MN: Did people participate in that like they did at Heywoods?

RP: Ya, pretty much. They have a pretty good social club. In the early days the company was pretty much involved in the social club to. Use to have a lot of activities. Pretty good social club.

MN: More so than the companies would be today?

RP: I think so. Oh, ya.

MN: You means in terms of money, or the family that runs the company?

RP: Both. The family would always be there. You know, and if there was any money needed to run the event, it would be there.

MN: I would like to ask you a few more questions, but, you said that you remember the beginning of the unioning coming in to Heywood Wakefield?

RP: Ya. I remember the union was coming in when I first started to work there, because I remember, we used to travel down from Winchendon and my rider would let us off in front of the door, and go park the car. It was in front of the door, and thats when they were passing our union leaflets. Then, thats when they were trying to organize. So I, I don't know when they actually signed their first contract.

MN: Was it the people at Heywood Wakefield trying to organizing or outside people?

RP: Well the ah, the man that was in charge of the union, in the city, with helpers from the factory, but the people passing out the literature was mostly, Heywood employees.

MN: Do you remember what the other employees thought of it?

RP: There was a little mixed feelings, I guess, both ways. But, I guess they felt they had to have a union back then. Today I think the unions have out-lived their usefullness. But, in that day, you had to have them because, some of the bosses we had back then, like the boss in the cabinet department was an ex wrestler, professional wrestler. He was short, but he was built like a tank, ya know, and he would not have a man working for him in his department he couldn't handle physically. If he thought he couldn't handle them, he would not allow that man to work in his department. Cause I remember, there was one guy that invited him out during the noon hour. They had a wrestling match up in the back, Monument Park. Word got around.

RP: (con't) There was going to be wrestling grudge match going on.

MN: They were angry with each other?

RP: Ya, it wasn't just no friendly thing. It was to see who was the best. So everybody was out there during noon hour. We had an hour off at that time, and (chuckle) I tell ya, that other guy was a, I remember him, I think he was a sweed, he was a big sweed. This Walter was a Finn and that big sweed picked him and he threw him right over his head. He landed on the ground flat on his back, you could almost hear, it was a crunching noise, that was the last of him, no more. He quit right away. The next day that guy wasn't working at Heywood no more.

MN: Really?

RP: Because, you know, there was no hearing. Hey if you didn't like a guy, he just said you're all done. There was nothing you could do about it. You were fired. You can't do that today.

MN: Why wouldn't people want a union?

RP: Today?

MN: No, then? You said there was mixed feelings about them coming in?

RP: Well, I really don't know. I think possibly the vast majority of them, - well as it turned out when it came down for a vote, the union won. Pretty handily. So it was proved that they definately wanted it. Because back then, you were talking about, I think it was something like 50¢ a month for union dues. Today, what is it? I think its \$15.00 a month now.

MN: Thirteen.

RP: Thirteen. So, see now Nichols & Stone has a strange situation cause Brewster, was, part of it was non-union. Nichols & Stone is all union. So I don't know how they are working that out now. There tryin to make it all one factory. I don't know what there doing with that union part of it. Course I'm not involved with it to much now, so I don't know what they are doing.

MN: And did you vote to join the union?

RP: At the time, ya, I did.

MN: Did you ever have any, did it help you in any way?

RP: Well, yes. It helped me because of what they had to do with the piece work rates. You know, they had to, it helped you seniority wise. That seniority thing helped a lot of people.

MN: What do you mean, it helped with the piece work rates?

- RP: Well if you got, if they had to set the rates the way the contract, whatever was in the contract, thats what they had to do. They had to let you know what you're, like they had to let you know time due on a job. He had to let you know, like say, within four hours, what the rate was going to be. See,
- MN: Why four hours, what does it matter?
- RP: It matters greatly. If they would make you, like if you were working on a piecework job, and they let you, you had to turn in how many pieces you had done at the end of the day. So if they waited until the next day, they look at your time slip and see how many pieces you turned in, and if he timed you, say the guy, during the half hour that he was timing you and it showed that you could produce ten pieces an hour, and thats all you could make. Ten was your limit going as fast as you could. He's got that down in black and white. The most you could make is ten an hour. If he waited a day or two to give you the rate and he would look on your timeslip, and see how many pieces you turned in, Well if you tried 20 pieces an hour, he knew that you were stickin him on that time study, see. So he would change his figures that he was going to give you, before he would give it to you.
- MN: So if you did it within four hours it would change?
- RP: If you did it within four hours, he couldn't wait to see how many you were going to turn in. He had to judge what kind of a timing you gave him. If he thought you gave him a fair timing, he'd set the rate for that. Before they didn't have to do that. Not only that, if before the union came in, if he timed you on a job and you could only make ten pieces an hour, he could set a rate at eight pieces an hour and there was nothing you could do about it. This is the rate. You either work at it, or if you didn't like it, you quit. You're only alternative was to quit.
- MN: You couldn't complain?
- RP: You couldn't complain then cause jobs weren't that great.
- MN: And you could not complain before the union to have it redone?
- RP: No. You can complain all you wanted to, but it would fall on deaf ears. With the union you had recourse to ask for arbitration if necessary.
- MN: Did you ever bring a grievance?
- RP: Oh, yes. Everytime I brought a grievance I won it to.
- MN: What kinds of issues would you bring a grievance for?
- RP: Most of the time it was because of piece work rates not being fair. I'd say piecework rates were probably 89% of it. Greivances.

- MN: And, what would happen when someone brought a grievance? How would it work?
- RP: Oh, you'd have to fill out papers stating what the grievance was for. One copy would go to the union, one copy to the manager, you kept a copy and your department for your steward. They would get together, thrash it out.
- MN: Would you be present then?
- RP: Ya. You could be. And, if they still couldn't get no satisfaction between the two an outside arbitrator was called in. But once an outside arbitrator was called in, the union and the company had to pay the arbitrator, so they didn't like to get the arbitrator. Actually, them guys would come up from Boston, or Worcester maybe, but mostly Boston. Then you gotta pay those guys, I imagine they had to pay them from the time they left Boston, till the time they were gonna get back home. It gets to be expensive.
- MN: And then they would decide.
- RP: When the arbitrator decided, which side was right, both sides had to go along with whatever they said. If he said you were right, right, wrong- wrong, then you had to accept it.
- MN: Did you ever take any kind of position in the area?
- RP: No. I don't know why, I never wanted to be involved in that. I was a member and that was enough.
- MN: Were those guys a little bit set-aside from the people running it?
- RP: Ya. Ya, they were, they had to be anti-company to be a union leader. Really, you know, if you get what I mean. I never was anti-company. I was always for getting along as smoothly as possible.
- MN: If the guys were say standing around, just shooting the breeze, then the union steward came in, would he be included in the group, or would they kind of ?
- RP: Oh, ya. I mean, there was never that, it was never that bad. Nothing drastic like that.
- MN: And also, the foreman, would the foreman, would the foreman ever stand around with the guys? Or would he stay apart?
- RP: Well, , , maybe a little apart, a little apart, but not, in my case I never had a problem with that.
- MN: And, how about women, were there women, male jobs and female jobs in the company?

RP: There were a lot of female jobs there, but gradually the woman started doing a lot of jobs that were males work, especially today, there all jobs that it used to be all men doing. A lot of them. Over Nichols & Stone today, they've got woman running saws and all kinds of dangerous jobs.

MN: Is there anything that females don't do? Or can't, or they won't let them do?

RP: A few. Very few today. I've never seen a woman running a shaper yet. Its very dangerous and course its heavy. Its heavy and you have to run up against the knife you know, spinning at a terrific speed. Very dangerous. I've seen women do everything but that. So, at Nighols & Stone now there doing them all.

MN: What about at Heywood Wakefield?

RP: Then it was mostly, , then a lot,,, most all of those jobs were done by men, in fact, in the cabinet department where I first started, I'd say we had about,, we must have had twenty to thirty people. Just in that department 20 to 30 people. There was no women at all. All men. Thats cabinet assembly department. It was all men, and then gradually, they'd bring in a woman, but during the war they put them in. It was the first time you say a woman in the cabinet department. First time during the war.

MN: Doing the same job as the guys?

RP: Doing say easier jobs that the guys use to do, like, assembling drawers. They use to have a whole lot of jobs like that. Not on the big presses though. The big presses it still was men. Course during the war it slowed down, the woodworking part of it. Slowed down, really almost came to a halt, because they wouldn't let them use the metal for the hardware they need to assemble the furniture. There was a lot of things we had to substitute, wood for metal, even like the space rocker. See that rocker, thats a heywood base rocker. I want to get rid of that and I want to get rid of this chair here. They don't fit in here. We got another couch ordered.. We just put a new rug down. That there, they continued to make it, that particular chair right there, during the war, but we were making wooden springs. Right now, that rocks on two metal springs. Well this guy, at the time, he was a foreman in the cabinet room, Gordon Bowler, from Winchendon. He eventually started that boat building factory in Winchendon. He come up with an idea of how to make a spring out of wood, two pieces, tied it on the chair, it worked. So, we were making that chair with a wooden spring. After a few years, the thing must have broke where them metal springs will last forever. We were making baby carriages back then, and we bought a stroller from there, seconds, we used to be able to buy all the seconds. All of the frame-ware and the wheels were all wood, in place of the metal that they used to use. But, it served the purpose.

MN: So, after the war, when there were a lot of woman in there, did they stay?

RP: There wasn't a lot of woman in there, especially in the cabinet department, because the cabinet department, like I say, they had to cut down business drastically, because of the war products. There were so many involved. There was a lot of people involved in the time bomb diffuse, and all of this other stuff, and a, then when the war ended, everybody had to go back to where they had been.

TAPE 2, SIDE B

MN: When you say a lot of moving around, do you mean, from one department to another, or do you mean people moved out of Gardner?

RP: Both. A lot were moving from one department to another. Good Lord, they, as soon as the war ended, of course by now during the war I was a welder. I was welding radar antennas and all kinds of stuff like that you know. Course when that stopped, it cut everything off. Just like that, there was no finishing up any orders or any of that. It just stopped.

MN: Was it one day you were working, , the next day you stopped?

RP: They said, course the government don't want to buy any more of these things. They have no use for them. The war is over. So it stopped very abruptly. So, we, that meant that all these departemnts had to be changed back. Like that welding, all along Pine St., on the second floor, the whole length of Pine St. there, that was all, , and third floor and some of the fourth floor, that was all welding. That was all welding stuff we were doing for the navy. Boy, when you cut that right off, all of a sudden. There were a lot of people here. What do you do with them. They shifted us all over the place. One day they put me unloading, , they wanted to put me unloading a boxcar of coal, where the power station is. They wanted me to go up, climb up in a box car full of coal and shovel it down into the shoot that feeds into the thing. I says, no way, no way am I going to do that. So I went and seen the personal manager. I said, that boss over there wants me to climb up in the coal car and I ain't climbing up in no coal car. For one thing you ruin whatever clothes you had on for one days work. You gotta throw them away. He says no, no, no, we will find something else for you. They found me something. I finally ended back up in the cabinet room where I had started.

MN: Again, was that by choice, or did they just put you there?

RP: Well, it was because I had the seniority. See, my seniority, is over all these years, is what got me back in the cabinet room. Otherwise, I would probably been laid off.

MN: But I thought if you switched departments you had to start all over in terms of seniority?

RP: No. You carried your seniority throughout the plant. Only thing is if you were working in a department, and there was an opening in that department, you got first chance to bid on that job. Then it would be open to the rest of the plant, and if nobody still signed up for the job in the plant, then they would go outside, hire outside help. You started with your department first, gave them preference. So, seniority, back in the cabinet room after the war, which was better than being out completely. Of course, it was a big drastic cut in pay at the time.

MN: After the war, the pay was cut?

RP: Oh, sure. It took a while before you'd get back to where you were producing furniture on a large scale again. So, we had day work jobs. We didn't have any piecework jobs. Most of the jobs then were day work jobs and it took quite a while to get back to where we were producing, ah, a production that was making some good jobs.

MN: Did it take so long when you were converting to war work? Was that as long a process?

RP: I don't, well ya, it was, it probably was, but we didn't notice it so much. When they were converting to a war job, like they would set up one department, they would re-work that whole department and you were still working in another part of the factory, you didn't notice it so much. Then when all this welding stuff was set up, they would start pulling guys over from wherever they could get them. They were losing a lot of people to the army and navy at the time to.

MN: When it was over, the whole plant -

RP: Oh, when it was over the whole plant was out all at once. Also, you noticed it more because it was like everybody getting cut-off at once.

MN: How come you didn't get laid off?

RP: My seniority. I had enough seniority to stay in that cabinet room. In other words, I had to look, somebody with a load of seniority that was still working in the cabinet room, had to get pushed out of there because of me and whoever else was coming in. So, the lowest ones would get pushed out. There was no other jobs anywhere else in the factory, then they would get laid-off. But then again, there is one of the good parts of the union. Seniority helped. All the guys who went in the service, their seniority kept growing. If they worked at Heywood say for five or ten years before they went in the service, seniority kept accumulating. If they came back and wanted their job back, their seniority would give them their job back. A lot of them didn't want their jobs back, but the ones that did, it was there.

MNI: And, um, how long did you stay in the cabinet assembly?

RP: Until my 30th year.

MNI: So you stayed in the same room?

RP: See, I went back into that cabinet assembly, after the war and I stayed there until I went into management. When I got the management job, I had that for the last ten years.

MNI: And what did you do exactly?

RP: In the cabinet assembly? Well I, started with the hand sanding which was the low end of it, and eventually worked my way up to casepress. In the casepress, you took the casegoods together like a bureau, and you assembled the whole bureau. Put it together. Put it on a conveyor system, a roller conveyor, and the guys would fit the drawers in them, hang the doors, complete it. Then it would keep going down the roller conveyor to go out to the paint shop. Then I eventually moved up to the, well I was doing the case goods on a press before the war.

MNI: And that was in the white you would assemble them.

RP: Ya, and after the war, when I came back to the cabinet room, I went to about the best paying job. It was on the line fitting the doors, hanging the doors, and fitting drawers, and finishing the whole case up completely, and move her down to the paint shop.

MNI: So that's what you did for most of the time then?

RP: Yup.

MNI: Would you have time to chat with the other guys in the room with you? Wasn't it many of the same people throughout the years.

RP: Oh, yeah, a lot of the same people.

MNI: So you must have been good friends with them?

RP: Oh, sure, you'd, , it wasn't the type of the thing where you had to stick your nose to the grindstone, and not even look at your fellow workers. You could chat with a worker, or everybody around you.

MNI: Did you eat lunch with them?

RP: Chat, and fight, whatever, argue politics, argue everything. We'd eat lunch. Lunch hour, we used to have a whole hour for lunch back then. So, a whole hour, we played cribbage, some card games.

MNI: Where?

RP: Right in the shop, we'd set up a little corner. Anyplace we could find a place to sit, four, five, six, guys, for whatever you were playing. Play cards.

MN: Then would you eat there also?

RP: Ya, you'd eat your lunch, eat your lunch there.

MN: What about after work? Would you see those guys like socially on the weekends?

RP: Sometimes. Not to often. Not to often.

MN: So you had friends from somewhere else.

RP: Well usually, your friends were usually your neighbors or your relatives around. People that you worked with, are not the people went out with evenings.

MN: You know I find that alot.

RP: Do you find that?

MN: Yes. But not in the other towns. You know there are people working in other towns on the same projects, but in some of the other towns, it was the people they work with that were their friends, but here what your saying is right across the board pretty much true. Its been the same.

RP: Well, we were quite friendly with one couple over the years and we still are today. But, in fact, his wife and my wife carried their first at the same time. We lived, well there again, I think the reason, it wasn't, he worked in the wood shop way across the street down on the first floor, I worked way across the street up in the cabinet room. So actually, our work, we were like miles apart as working together. We were both young, newly weds more or less and they were both having their first child at the same time, and we lived across the street from each other, up in little Canada. I think it was because we lived across the street from each other.

MN: Where was little Canada?

RP: Ya know where the Napoleon Club is? Thats little Canada. Two houses this side of the Napoleon Club is where we lived. A three room apartment, upstairs. They lived across the street in one, a three room apartment, upstairs.

MN: Was the Napoleon Club there then?

RP: The Napoleon Club was there. The Napoleon Club is where we had, wait a minute, ya, we had our reception there when we got married. Ziggy Wagner had an orchestra and he played for our wedding and he also played when our kids threw us a twenty-fifth anniversary. Hes gone now. Old Ziggy Wagner, had that orchestra. He was a saxophone player. That was his part time thing, the orchestra. He was the drawer maker for the cabinet department.

IMN: Ziggy was?

RP: Ziggy Wagner, for many years. He was a drawer maker. Also, Ziggy Wagner and Leo Stasikalis, you know Stasikalis's Appliances in Gardner?

IMN: Is that near the Big D?

RP: Ya. Well, the father, he just died a few years ago, the original man that started the appliances, he worked at Heywoods at the time. So they are the two who started the Heywood Credit Union. There the ones who went to Boston to get the charter to start the credit union at Heywoods.

IMN: And would you ever go into the Napoleon Club otherwise?

RP: No, I didn't drink. I never was a drinker so I wouldn't go in for just a , , the only time was when we were having our golfing tournaments, we use to have a tournament at the end of the year. We had a nice little golf league at Heywoods. We always had over \$40.00 in our league, just Heywood people, and we would play a match at the end of the year. We had a tournament and then we had a banquet. For quite a while we use to have it at the Country Club in Winchendon, but then, after they, set the golf course here in Gardner, we started having it down here. We would have our banquet at the Napoleon Club. I can remember, we furnished that three room apartment, there was a furniture company here in Gardner, Lemay's Furniture, its in that old two by four where that old man has that children's, little kids clothing, right next to Sully's. That was a furniture store believe it or not.

IMN: Did they sell Heywood Wakefield?

RP: No, they didn't sell Heywood Wakefield furniture. They sold cheap stuff. We furnished three rooms of furniture, everything you can think of, including the linoleum, the ice box, , there were no refrigerators then, only ice boxes, and course in those days if you bought a set of furniture, the lamps they used to through in for free, that was a gift. All your lamps, everything for \$550.00. For the whole works, three rooms. Parlor set, the whole parlor set, and a little rug there for the parlor, linoleum for the kitchen. Today, single chairs sell for that. Just a regular dining room chair. Thats the difference in a dollar today.

IMN: Is that what you did, you got three rooms from them?

RP: Well, sure, I bought three rooms of furniture, \$5.00 down, and \$5.00 a week. Sure.

IMN: Do you remember the fifties?

RP: And no interest on that.

IMN: Thats the rub.

RP: Ya, no interest. They'd let you but furniture on credit, no interest. Today, interest costs you as much as the furniture.

MN: I can't even get gas until they check all my credit references to heat my house. They had to call all my credit references before they will give me gas. I said I was going to pay my bill but it doesn't matter.

MN: Do you remember in the fifties, I noticed in the shop news that they start to talk alot about, there seems to be a big reflection of the McCarthy era. They talked alot about to be a good american and they had articles about anti-communist type, and little comic books about working hard and little spotlights on people. I don't know if that brings back any memory or if it just doesn't strike anything?

RP: It don't strike anything with me.

MN: When you were assembling the doors and drawers, did things change over time and how you did it, or in mechanizing?

RP: Oh, a big change in the equipment that you used. Now back, when I first started over there, for one thing, you had to buy your own tools, if anything,, the only thing the company use to furnish back then was a hand screw driver. If, like when you were fitting drawers you needed rabbit planes, different types of rabbit planes, so the drawers would close flush, you had to buy them yourself. Today the company, any company going now, all that stuff is furnished. We had to buy our own, back then, so you had to be pretty careful with your tools, because when you bought your own, you had to be careful not to leave them laying around. Someone else would lift them, ya know. Ah, but we, , especially the big thing I noticed, was the electric drill (excuse me) the electric tools we use to use. The Company furnished the electric tools, but the electric screwdrivers, I remember the first time we used those, they were so big and bulky you needed two hands to hold the screwdriver. The body was big, and how did you hold the screw up to get it started and drive it in with this big thing. It wasn't to long before they started getting better. They started getting newer models. Course, then we use to use all slotted screws. I don't know if you know the difference between a philips head screw and a slotted screw. That was a big difference, when the philips head screws came out. Now a slotted screw, when the screwdrivers get to be better, if you start a screw in a whole, like in puting a hidge on a door, and you bear on it to get it started, and the tip would slip out of that slot, ya know, and naturally if that happened, there would be a lot of damage to the piece of wood. Sometimes it was almost impossible to repair the damage that you had done to the chair. Then they started coming out with philips screws, and the screwdrivers didn't slip out like that. That was a big help. Then the tools got better.

MN: When they came out with the electric screwdriver it must have slowed you down in your piece work?

RP: Oh no. They speeded you up.

MN: Even though it was big?

RP: Huh? They were bigger. Still it was faster than turning that thing. Before, in fact, when I first started hand sanding, I remember the guys that were on the piece work were using ratchet screwdrivers. You know what a ratchet screwdriver is? Its a long thing and its got like a swivel in it, and if you push on it it makes the tip turn. Even thats a lot better than turning them by hand. But still, when the electric screwdrivers came out, and then when they came out with the air-drivers, that was a big difference there.

MN: Would they re-time you then because it was going faster?

RP: Well it was all,, it was,, everything changed as the tools changed, the rates, and all changed right along with it. But the good tools they got today, boy, they do that stuff like nothing now.

MN: I had a few more questions. Would it be better if I ask you now or could I come back and ask you. I don't know if you are tired.

RP: It doesn't matter.

MN: Alright, I don't want to wear you out. So, okey, those tools would have changed, and then the roller conveyor was already in there when you were working. That was not something that changed?

RP: Ya. That went in while I was there. The roller conveyor started during the time I was in, , the early part of the time I was there. At first, when I first started to work there, the guys before I got to be a pieceworker,, the guys used to do, like they had a bench in front of them, work place, they would have to, say the boss would give them five or six pieces to do, they would have to drag the bureau, put it on his bench, and go out and get the drawers, drag them over there, fit the drawers in, and then, get the doors or whatever had to go on it. He would have to finish it all up complete right there. He'd get it all finished and put it on the side. They had a guy who was inspector, he'd come along with a piece of chalk in his hand and he would inspect the whole thing. Anything he saw wrong, he'd chalk it up, and the guy had to fix it on his own time. If there was something wrong with that piece, you fixed it on your own time before it went out to the paint shop. Then of course, when the roller conveyor came along, everything went on a conveyor, then the inspector went way down to the other end of the room just before the piece went into the paint shop. If there was something wrong down there it was taken off the line and brought around and they had repairmen that would correct the problem.

MN: But they got paid for correcting the problem?

RP: Ya, they got paid for correcting the problem, unless it was something they could blame you deliberately, something that they knew you weren't doing what you were suppose to have done. They they would make you go down and fix it. Most of the time it was little that wasn't the guys fault.

MN: What other things would have happened, like after the tools, the tools would have changed?

RP: The tools changed. We went from electric tools to air tools. Air tools were a big improvement over the electric tools. Now they've got the screwdrivers now, now there only this big. You can hold it like a little pistol in your hand. Do anything with it.

MN: And its connected by a wire?

RP: Just with a hose. A little small hose to the airline. They work beautiful. Some of the last electric tools were pretty good to. They were coming along pretty good. There are some good tools around.

MN: Towards the end of the days you were doing assembly, was that air tools then?

RP: Most of the production assembly was done with air tools.

MN: But you still did a similar procedure to what you had done before? Putting on the doors and the drawers?

RP: Ya, the procedures and everything was basically the same. In the cabinet department they had by now, when the cabinet department folded up, they had three rolls of conveyors that all converged down to one coming into the paint shop. AT one time we had four lines in the cabinet room.

MN: And how many would have been putting on the doors and drawers like you?

RP: Ah, maybe three or four.

MN: Where was that? What building?

RP: The railroad track, on the Pine Street side, the building towards the railroad track, you know the front building, Pine Street is one building, there is a separate building, with an alley in between them. That building toward the railroad on the third floor. You know, the bridge that comes down, it crosses the road, that use to be quite a thing. In the days before, it has quite a curve to it. It goes from that floor up there, down, the way it comes into this building, that was the cabinet room. When you come down that bridge, it doesn't come straight into it, you have to make a sharp right turn to come into the room. The stock room, where all the stock was for the cabinet room was stored, was on that same floor, but on the side, across the road, running along the monument park. That building right there, that whole floor, that was the stock.

RP: (con't) So a couple of guys that worked in that department, and whatever you needed, say you were going to make 200 of such and such a bureau, they would pile all this stock on flats and truck it down to your department. Sometimes they'd come down that hill and they'd lose control and many a load was dumped over coming down that hill.

MN: You mean the bridge?

RP: Ya, the bridge. When you get to the bottom, they'd be going to fast, they didn't hold it back enough, they couldn't make the turn and everything would go flying.

MN: Was it a covered bridge at the time?

RP: Ya, it was always covered.

MN: So they wouldn't fall outside?

RP: Everything would fall inside.

MN: I went there recently, in that bridge.

RP: Oh ya.

MN: With George Heywood, and its full of dead pidgeons and birds and,

RP: No kidding. It use to be all nice and clean. The floor was all nice and smooth.

MN: We took video tape pictures. I will show them to you. I will bring them in sometime.

RP: Oh good.

This kid from Winchendon that worked with us. He was quite a cartoonist. He was very good. He drew a cartoon one time and it was three pictures. It was supposedly the guy that does the trucking, kind of a funny picture of this guy, and as he started down the bridge, maybe a quarter of the way down the bridge, he started to go to fast, then he's losing control and the last picture he had him sitting in amongst all this stuff and all the stuff is falling all over him. It was really good. They had it pasted on the wall there for many years. Pasted on the wall inside the bridge.

MN: Would they have a bulletin board or something in your room?

RP: Ya. They always did. We always had bulletin boards. Would they have besides official notices? Would people put funny things up there?

MN: Would they be official notices? Would people put funny things up there?

- RP: Sometimes, sometimes. Sometimes people would have a little remark to make. They'd put it up.
- MN: And, would you have parties in your room? Would the woman organize showers or things like that?
- RP: The woman were usually big on parties. The only thing we use to have was Christmas parties. Use to have Christmas parties within the department years ago, way back.
- MN: The men would organize these?
- RP: Ya, well when the men organized it, it was mostly a drinking, it wasn't much of a food party. It was more or less a drinking party. In these departments where it was all men, and the drinking would get out of control alot of times. We were always lucky that there were no injuries. Cause I saw one time, a wrestling match took place because the guys were feeling good and mad at each other and started horsing around, and the first thing ya know, there wrastling right in front of an elevator, an open elevator. The elevator only had one stick across, kind of a fence, course they don't have that anymore, but at that time, they did, thats all they had. That time there, we're lucky that one of them guys didn't fall down that elevator. Nothing ever happened. Thats why the company put a stop to it after a while. No more parties in the shop. This was a good thing, because this same Walter Wironen, the boss in that department lived in Royalston at the time. He drove his car from Heywoods to Royalston. He was so drunk, he could hardly see. Everbody was saying how they saw him going down the street. He was all over the road. How he got to Royalston nobody ever knows. He made it. (laugh) Its a good thing the company put a stop to it after that.

TAPE 3, SIDE A

- MNI: What do you mean? They did not have these little birthday parties and things after that?
- RP: Not in departments were they were mostly all men. The men were not to big on stuff like that, making a birthday party. It had to be something more important than a birthday party to arouse the interest of the men.
- MN: What about a marriage or?
- RP: All they would do, , , if one of the guys in the department was getting married or something, they would take up a collection and give them a gift, or something like that.
- MNI: And they would just give them a gift at work without a party?
- RP: Usually it was cash. Ya know, take up a collection, present it to them. Or if the guy was leaving to go in the service, they'd take up a collection. If he was leaving to go to another job and had been there a few years, they might take up a collection. But, outside of taking up collections there's not much. They weren't much for parties and that, in the cabinet department.

RP: (con't) I know some of the departments where they were a lot of women, like in the shiping end, down there, they were always having some kind of party going on. They'd bring in cakes, and they painted stuff. They weren't about to bring in a cake for all of us. Thats about it.

MN: Did you ever care?

RP: No. Not really.

MN: And, when one of your kids were born would they do anything for you?

RP: No, No, nobody did for a birth. If you went to the hospital they might send a basket or something.

MN: A basket?

RP: A basket of fruit. That was way back that we'd do that. My last 10 to 20 years I'd say, they wouldn't even bother with that.

MN: Would you exchange Christmas cards with the people there?

RP: If you were close. But, in fact, I met just yesterday at the bank, Gardner's first millionaire.

MN: Gardner has a millionaire?

RP: Oh ya, we have a number of them, but this was a lottery millionaire. The one and only. At that time a million dollars was the big prize, there was no 2 million. That was the big prize. He worked at Heywoods for most of his life. He always had a low paying job. Never had a good paying job because he was a little slow. He had a little problem when he came back from the service and he was kinda slow and he finally hit that jackpot. The first millionaire in Gardner. I met him at the bank yesterday. He says he has been living in Hawaii for about five years. Now he bought a house in Gardner.

MN: He came back from Hawaii to Gardner?

RP: Sure. He bought a house in Gardner.

MN: He rather live in Gardner than Hawaii?

RP: Probably, because he can afford to live anywhere he wants to. He bought a house. I didn't talk to him to long because there was a lot of people around us in the bank. He talks very loud, ya know, he talks to you like this, as if he were across the street. So, I didn't talk to him to long in the bank. He worked there for, , in fact he was the guy that was selling the lottery tickets in Heywoods before lottery tickets were legal. (laugh) This was a different kind of lottery. It use to be the ah, treasurer balance, that they use to call it then. It was a little ticket that you bought for 50¢. You bought the ticket and you opened it up and there was a long number. If you had the same last numbers as the treasury balance that day it would pay a few hundred dollars or

RP: (con't) something. It was actually illegal gambling.

MN: Was it just at Heywood Wakefield they did this?

RP: No, No it was everywhere. That was going on all over the country. He was just one of the guys that happened to sell me my ticket.

MN: Did you win?

RP: Never. He was a guy who always sent me a Christmas card. Course after he won the million dollars, I guess he went off to Florida, he was there for quite a while. I don't know when he went to Hawaii, but he said that he lived there for about five years. So I hadn't heard from him in a long time. I didn't know if he was still healthy or not, but he spotted me in the bank. He was hollaring. He remembered me.

MN: Some one told me that in Lowell the barber shops used to beebookie joints, was it the same here?

RP: Oh, sure. Bookie joints, I would,, there was, lets see, you know in the back, well you know that little place right on the corner from Heywoods, they sold clothing in there?

MN: Monique's Boutique?

RP: That used to be a filling station. It was a gas station, garage and repair. Right aside that there is a fire hydrant, right as you're going down Pine Street. Right behind that fire hydrant there was a little restaurant. That thing probably wasn't any bigger than this part of my living room. I think he had a little bar with seven stools over there, and I guess a wall over here, and a little bar, and the door set right there, and there was a window there. There was a little small window on top of the counter. I was sitting on that stool one day. I had my lunch there, in later years I had my breakfast and lunch there. My breakfast, I'd have a coffee and a donut. That cost 10¢. The coffee was a nickel, and the donut was a nickel. If that guy could be alive today and see what Mr. Donut was right now a dollar for the same thing.

MN: I want you to know I bought a cup of coffee at the Hyatt this week, and a cup of styrafoam coffee in Cambridge was \$1.85.

RP: Oh geez, ya. I know we went down to the Sheriton Boxboro last weekend and the coffee down there is \$1.25. Anyway this little restaurant that used to be a bookie joint. They sold everything from horse racing, you could place a bet on the horses, or you could play the numbers game. Everything being sold at the time you could get in there. Under the counter they had some cigar boxes with all different kinds of things and slips, betting slips. He had a little back room, it was sposed to be storage room and everything but there was a guy that used to come in during the noon hour. He was one of the chief bookies. But the owner himself Hoogie, he was head of the bookie operation for the whole city of Gardner. They raided the place while I'm sitting on

RP: (con't) the stool one noon hour. I was sitting on that second stool, from the window, and I could see that little small square window facing the gas station. Hoogie had just put my plate down for my dinner I had ordered, and I see that car pull up, he pulled right up there, and there are six guys in the car. Plain clothes. Mind you six guys in a car. The door opened, and I heard they say "lets go" They hit that door, all six of them at the same time, course, trouble is, that he had a storm door on the outside of it, and they hit it the wrong way (laugh), they were trying to push it in, and it opened out.

MN: Why didn't they just open the door?

RP: Why didn't they just open the door? Well, after they hit it, they realized they were pushing the wrong way, they backed off, and they opened the door, and those six guys swarmed in there, and course the restaurants full of customers having dinner. We were just minding our own business. We were just having dinner. We weren't playing any bets but they grabed everything in that place. They jumped behind the counter. Evidently they had allready, well looked at the floor because they knew where all the stuff was. They got all his cigar boxes and got all his bets. They even took the pencils out of the guys hands because he was writing down bets with it.

MN: And that was the end of him?

RP: No, Hey, them guys didn't care about that. What happens? You know what happens. They go to court and they pay a \$50.00 fine, and they're right back in business, the same thing. Whats a \$50.00 fine. That only meant the difference in a couple of bets. They pay the fine and they were right back in business the next day, and forget it.

MN: Did any women go in there or was it mostly guys?

RP: It was about 95% guys. Cause it was so small and cramped ya know. The food was good. It was cheap. Good lord, you'd get a good dinner for 35¢. I mean a dinner.

MN: How long was he there till?

RP: Till he died. He died very suddenly. It was a very surprise to the whole city of Gardner when he went. When that aneurysm in the back of his head, killed him just like that one night. Workin one day, the next day he was dead.

MN: Was that before Heywoods closed?

RP: Ya. Ya, because the building itself stayed there. Well, his wife owned the building, and she leased it out for a while. Then a couple came in, a guy and his wife, they ran it for it must of been a couple of years. They put out a nice meal. She was a pretty good cook. They were running real good meals. His wife got a little greedy and she kept raising the rent on the building and it got to the point where they were, they decided they could do better by both of them

RP: (con't) going to work for somebody else than to try to run the business. They gave it up then. See the wife got greedy and thats what killed it. She seen they were making a good business, she kept raising the rent. When they closed, she never rented that building again. She got stuck with it until the day they had the big, I don't know who owned it, but I guess Conant Ball bought it to just knock it down so their trailer trucks could get in there. They used to back their, the trailer truck drivers going into Conant Ball used to have to pull up on Pine Street, then back the trailer, start backing it close to Hoogie's building, they had to cut it real close, otherwise they couldn't make the corner. Manys-the-time, we'd be sitting in thier and they'd knock the corner of the building off with the trailer truck. So Hoogie would collect on the insurance and have it fixed up and they'd do it again. Some driver not to expert cutting that corner, hit the corner, so they eventually bought the building and tore it down. Then they had no problem getting the trailer trucks down.

MN: He was probably thrilled to death when they hit the building, so he could get the insurance?

RP: Sure. (laugh) He'd get the insurance money. There was a time in between that driveway and Conant Balls business, when I first went to work there, there was a chinese laundry there. Little two-bit building. Chinaman in there all alone. He did shirts and stuff.

MN: What happened to him?

RP: He went out of business and they tore the building down.

MN: Somebody told me there were two chinese laundry places at one time?

RP: That other building, ya know, as you keep going up Pine Street, and you go by where West Lynde comes in, well that building right there, that was Miller's Opera House. That used to be an Opera House. I remember when it was an Opera House, they had good music, they use to have shows and stuff. Of course, Conant Ball bought it up. They boarded up the glass windows, those glass windows in the front and everything.

MN: In an Opera House, would they sing Opera?

RP: I don't, I never saw a show there, but they did have opera there.

MN: Oh, really.

RP: Oh yes. That was Miller's Opera House.

MN: I thought they called it that but they never really had opera?

- RP: Oh ya. They tell me, of course it was before my time, but in my the room was still there but they got some big pool tables and stuff in there and meeting rooms. We went there to shoot pool a couple of times. When we worked the night shift. When we worked the night shift, the things that went on, George Heywood wouldn't know about.
- MN: Thats alright, he probably won't listen to this. But, thats good to know because thats why the people worked there, not just to make the chairs and stuff.
- RP: It was a lot of hours we worked. Sometimes we'd work, it was nothing for us to work till midnight, work right through till midnight.
- MN: And, did you work the night shift?
- RP: No. I came close a few times. I never worked the night shift, but I worked a lot of nights, because those were over-time hours. A lot of over-time hours.
- MN: And what, you can't get fired now, what did they used to do, play pool?
- RP: Oh ya. Sometimes we'd go over and play a game of pool and we were still punched in. Then we'd go back out, punch out and go home. (ha) This was during the war. There was all kinds of things going on during the war.
- MN: I think people still do stuff like that today.
- RP: Oh sure. You can find it a lot of places. (laugh)
- MN: And just to finish up, can you tell me about the last days of Heywood Wakefield when you were there? I mean when did you get an idea that things were not going well?
- RP: Well,
- MN: I was curious that it mattered that Richard Greenwood got eased out of his job. Did people notice what was going on?
- RP: Well that Richard Greenwood left, that was way back, we still operated a full factory a lot of years after Richard Greenwood left.
- MN: Did you care that he left?
- RP: Well, I didn't really know if the Heywoods were going to be there or not. I had no way of knowing, and a, course Richard Greenwood was a pretty smart fellow. He was a pretty good business man and I don't know if that had anything to do with it but, after all those years, course they was involved in so many things, things that they tried that cost a lot of money. You often wondered how the heck they were going to pay for those things. That had some of us battle down fall, and course the buildings were now getting older.

RP: (con't) Like they use to have this company come up from Connecticut to paint the buildings. Well all those windows, thats a lot of painting. All scaffolding. Painting the bridges. Keeping it up all the time, thats expensive, and a, even those bridges running across the road, well whoever the owner is, pays a fabulous insurance to have that bridge run over the road. Thats why they wanted to tear them down in this project here going on now. They want to tear those bridges down but the, I guess its the Heritage Park end of it, wouldn't let them do it because to maintain the outside appearance you gotta keep the bridges. Well, when Heywood in there we used, like this first bridge on this side, big icicles used to hang in one spot, and from the dripping water, when that happened Heywoods use to have to go out, have a man down in the road to watch the traffic, and then have another guy up on the bridge to pull the ice down. If they ever fell on a car goin by somebody could get killed very easily. They were like a spear. So its expensive to keep that up. I don't know how many years they'll be able to keep it, because the insurance premium to keep that bridge across the road, somebody is paying that, a terrific premium. And now, they're just doing it for the, probably with all the money they're taking in they don't care. They're probably taking in enough money that it pays for it. But then the buildings are getting pretty old, ah, maintainance was a problem, and then trucking everything, the elevators were getting old. We had some elevators in there that were so ancient you wouldn't believe. Especially where its six floors high, down the end of the flat iron building. Two elevators there, one of them wasn't too too bad, but the one that was over on that side, that one was really an antique. It started gradually going down when they decided to close everything across the road, on that side of the road and move everything over here.

MN: On the Pine St. side?

RP: On the Pine St. side. You knew it was just a matter of time when they were actually going to close. You could see that happening.

MN: Could you see the company going downhill all the time, I mean a lot of people noticed in the late 60's early 70's that it was going to go out, and they quit.

RP: I think that the people that said that in the 60's, that was a little premature judgment on their part because I don't think there was that much indication. Things weren't that bad. I think, John Heywood's son, at the end his son Jack, was running the business as far as production, over everything. He was my boss, and I think that if he had been there earlier, it might have made a big difference. He was a pretty sharp guy. I think he just came in there to late.

MN: He was a young guy then?

RP: Ya, he was young. He was John's son. See John is my age, he was in the same class as I was in school. If Jack had been a generation ahead of his father, it would have made a difference.

MN: What did he do differently?

RP: He seemed to have the know how. I don't know why but, and a, plus he was on the job all the time. He was always out in the factory. He knew what was going on. He knew what I was doing all the time. He knew what I needed. If I needed, he knew about it cause he was always out there. But the brothers, you could see that they weren't out there in the plant.

MN: I've heard that before. Where were they?

RP: In the office. They'd stay there. They depended on their people to do the job, which is what they should do. But I always say that if you're gonna run a plant you have to know whats goin on, or you're not gonna have it very long.

MN: Was Richard Greenwood out there, when he was there that is?

RP: He use to make his daily tours through the place. He knew what was going on outtthere.

MN: I wonder why they didn't have that sense, the two brothers, John and George? They just couldn't connect with it for some reason.

RP: The reason they closed was that the business, the factory itself was getting to out-dated. The machineries was pretty well out-dated. Plus the management didn't seem to get out there and patrol. Competitive prices and wages. What else could they do.

MN: Did people still feel loyalty to the company at the end? It seems at the beginning people felt pretty loyal. Like a family.

RP: It was very family oriented in the early daysbut not so much so at the end. Especially after the word started going around that they might close.

MN: People felt betrayed.

RP: Ya. Right.

MN: Also, this whole idea, in the 50's when they might go down south, wasn't there a real scare that the company was going to close and move down south?

RP: They did move some of the business down there. They moved a lot of the business down there in fact all the car seat stuff and school furniture. That used to be a big thing up here. It was a big big business over here. That all moved south.

MN: Was'nt that one of the reasons for the strike in 1957?

RP: Ya, that was part of it.

MN: The people were afraid the whole company was going to go?

RP: Well, I think they kinda suspected they might pull something like that.

MN: Thats what happened in all the cities like Lowell and Lawrence. People felt that all the mills were moving down south.

RP: Well you see, I always looked at it this way, there were a lot of these companys from all around Massachusetts moving down south because, by now, a lot of these shops around here were unionized, and down South they were'nt union. So they were getting much lower wages. But I always figured, well, they'll go through this whole process of moving down south, because now they got low wages, they probably get a tax exemption, whatever, from the town or city they were going to move into. Those people after a while, down there are going to say, Hey, we make it union, we get the same wages as up there. So they'll unionize, and now these companies will be all down there and one of these days, they gonna haft to start paying the same wages. I think it starting to happen allready for a lot of these companies down south are union. When they find out they been working for nothing, they ain't gonna do it. So whats gonna happen. Twenty years from now southern companies are going to move up north because the labor is cheaper. Maybe it won't ever happen, but I always thought the day would come when the places down there they would want the same wages we were getting.

MN: Do you remember when they madethe decision to open the plant in Tennessee. What the peoples reaction was?

RP: I think there was a lot of jealousy. Especially the ones that were losing their jobs. They felt pretty bad about it, but of course there wasn't much you could do about it.

MN: Oh, so they just left? They weren't placed in some other part of the company.

RP: Well a lot of them were placed in other parts of the company. But this is like any other job, you get shifted from one job to another. You're not gonna make the same money that you were. You're not going to be as comfortable for quite a while anyway. Its the same with any other company.

MN: What do you remember about the strike?

RP: I didn't vote for the strike to start with, because, well, I was one of the ones that was out voted. They said were going to go out on strike till we get more money than the company is offering us. We were out for eight weeks. We went back for less money than the original offer. After being out on the street for eight weeks, course I wasn't out on the street because I immediately went elsewhere and got a part time job, something else that I had been

RP: (con't) moonlighting for this other company anyway, before that.

MN: A furniture company?

RP: Ya, right up here on Lake St. at the time. I was working for them on the side. As soon as Heywoods went on strike, they wanted me to come in full time. So I went over and worked all day there. I wasn't making as much money as I was at Heywoods, but at least I survived. Some of the people that went walking the streets, were pretty despondent by the end of eight weeks.

TAPE 3, SIDE B

RP: Course at the time I wasn't one of the supervisors, I was still on production, a member of the union.

MN: Did that create any bitter feelings between people?

RP: A few. I think a lot of the people, ah, took outside work, but there was a number of them that couldn't find anything outside. Those are the ones that got hurt.

MN: And the ones who crossed the picket line were not well liked?

RP: No. Not at all. But I don't know if we had too many of them. I don't really remember it there was too many outside of the office workers. But then again, you can't blame them for crossing the picket line. They're not members of the union.

MN: And then, four years later there was another strike, right? in the early 60's?

RP: Ya, but that didn't amount to much. I don't remember how long we were out for that but it wasn't much.

MN: Do you remember what the issue was there?

RP: I don't really remember what the issue was then. It might have had something to do with the contract. I know at one time we had a closing on the contract, that we got 100 % of our piece work earnings if we were taken off of a job and put on other jobs, also, there was a cost of living clause in our contract. Everytime the cost of living went up so many points, our rates went up correspondantly. Well the company realized that that was a mistake on their part, letting us have that. That 100% average, and that cost of living clause, because it cost them plenty. A lot of people were taking advantage of it, especially the 100 %. If a guy had a job that didn't have a piece work rate on it, and maybe it was the kind of a job that was pretty hard to time, they would give you a 100%. So 100% was 100% of your average earnings. You'd drag that thing out and let it last as long as you could, right. So that's why it cost the company a lot of money. It was a bad thing so, first chance they got to knock that off the contract, I think it's about that time they were knocking them two things out of the contract. They were successful full in getting it.

MN: So those were the only two major strikes?

RP: Ya.

MN: After that first strike, did that change the way people felt about the company?

RP: It didn't change my way of thinking. I don't know about anybody else.

MN: Did it change your feelings towards the union?

RP: Not really. It changed my feelings towards some people in the union that were what I call agitators, what I call agitators.

NM: To outspoken?

RP: I think that one or two of these people, who primarily voted for the strike, it did change my feelings towards them a little.

MN: And you felt that the union was protecting you. There were other things that we did have the protection on.

RP: There were other things that we did have protection on.

MN: You stayed with the company right until it closed, right?

RP: Right up till they closed the doors.

MN: Why did you stay till the very end?

RP: Why? Well the thing is this, I could have left and loafed or I could, in fact, the company closed in May, 1979. I had at that time already been hired by the personnel manager of Nichols and Stone, because he was, by now, well for a few years, our credit union had to move down town from Heywoods. When we had the whole plant the credit union was in the main office. The company furnished us with headquarters, office space and the two girls we had working in the office. The company also paid all their insurance, and all the benefits that we got. The company paid them the same benefits. After the company had to get out of the main office and moved to this side of the road, closed down all that side of the road, they no longer wanted to support the credit union.

MN: When was that? Was it in the 70's.

RP: It was at least five years before they closed or maybe more. We had to go out on our own and get headquarters down in town. All this time I was vice-president of the credit union, for quite a number of years.

MN: Was that on your own time or company time?

RP: Up there we were on company time, because we use to have our meetings and everything during working hours. Always on company time.

RP: (con't) Course now we were downtown, now it had to be on our own time which was free because there was no money to pay our wages. So we rented a place for a while, then we had a chance to buy that colonial bank on Central St. We bought that. We only paid \$49,000 for it. I found out it was cheaper to buy than what we were paying for rent plus we had to pay our own utilities. Well the guy that was personel manager at Nichols & Stone had been appointed to our credit union committee. Now we were trying to include outside companies into our credit union to keep it solvent. We couldn't do it just on Heywood Wakefield people. There wasn't enough. So, we tried to get all these other companys in with us. When he found out that we were going to close, he knew my qualifications, and everything I did over there, and he says, I want you to come over to Nichols & Stone. He says, don't go anywhere, come over with us. So I more or less promised that I would. But in the meantime, after we closed, I got a phone call from a company way up on the Canadian border. I always figured that Jack Heywood must have put in a word for me with this company. They called me and asked me if I wanted to go up there. They would make it worth my while. At that time, I'm 57 years old. I figured I don't want to pack up and go to a strange place, at 57 years old. I'd rather stay where I am, even though its less money. Nichols & Stone started me at the same wage that I was getting as supervisor at Heywoods. They asked what I was getting, and said we'll pay you the same thing. So they let me loaf all summer. I told them I wanted to enlarge my carport at the time. I loafed all summer, collected unemployment. It was the first time in my life I collected unemployment. I was collecting unemployment checks for doin nothing. I built my carport then in August I decided well I better not stretch it to long, so I went to work. They just let me hang around the plant, more or less, until they finally got rid of the boss in this department and they put me in. Thats how come I went over there, because of my association with the credit union and his association with the credit union.

MN: Was that Red Riley?

RP: No, that wasn't Red Riley then. A guy by the name of Carriero. He's in Ashburnham now. The company canned him, then they had one other guy I think before Red Riley came in.

MN: Would you have wanted your kids to work in Nichols & Stone or Heywoods if they were still here?

RP: Not really. Theres not much of a future if your going to stay in the woodworking industry, I think. I would rather see them do what they did. They all went to college and they all went out and there all doing pretty well. My oldest son, is a district manager with the Friendly chain. He has the Gardner stores, Fitchburg, Leominster, Worcester, Holden. My youngest son is a school teacher here at the Elm St. school. My oldest daughter married a lawyer in New Bedford and she went through college. Before she got married she was working radio and television, well she started with channel 7 Boston, then to New Bedford.

RP: (con't) Well the reason she went to New Bedford, is the guy who was the assistant manager at channel 7, when New Bedford's channel 6 first opened up, it was brand new, they stole him from down there and my daughter at the time was doing script writing in the channel 7, well he stole her to go with him down to channel 6, New Bedford and thats how come she ended up in New Bedford. My youngest daughter, well she's done a number of things, but right now she's working in the Watergate building in Washington, D.C. She just recently, I got a letter right here, got her brokers license. On the side she is selling real estate.

MN: Do any of them work with wood?

RP: No. Well my son can, but its all stuff he learned himself.

MN: Did you teach him?

RP: No. Its just all stuff he learned himself. He just seen what I did. For example, this house when I bought it, you saw those pictures, you know what the outside looked like, well the inside looked worse.

MN: And you fixed it all up?

RP: Everything in this house has been done by myself. Every door every window. Every ceiling, every wall has been changed in this house. When I bought this house there was a thick wall that came right through here. The people who lived here, who owned this house originally, had nine children they brought up in this house. They had two bedrooms upstairs and I changed everything around.

MN: and I'm curious about the paintings, what caused you to get interested in them?

RP: At night, they were having night classes, this woman was gonna teach oil painting at night, so I figured, I thought theres no reason why I can't do that. So I figured I'll go see if I can. I took the course. Nothing to it. (laugh)

MN: And when was that?

RP: 1978, ya know, this was something I was doing at night. Like last year, ah, the year before last at the Mount, ya know if your a senior citizen you can take any of the courses at the Mount for free providing they have enough paying students taking the course to pay for the course. I think its something like 12 for each class. Well two years ago, I always wanted to know how to type, and I never run a typewriter in my life, so my wife and I both took the course. It didn't cost us nothing. Well it cost us because we both went out and bought brand new typewriters. We bought two typewriters. They don't come cheap. We learned how to type.

MN: Next you'll be doing the computer.

RP: Well, you just said that now, last winter, they had a course in pencil drawing, I always wanted to take but couldn't find a teacher. I signed up for it but they didn't have enough people sign up for it, so they had to cancel it. So my second choice was New England history, so I took the New England history course.

MN: With Tom Valois?

RP: No the other one, I can't think of his name now. I did alright. I had never done a book report in my life, my life, like I say, I quit high school after two years and did go back and get my GED. I passed that easy one night and took that history, and like I said I had never done a book report in my life, but at that course you have to do two book reports. They had to be at least five pages long, each. I got an A and A plus. I passed the course with an overall, I got a B plus overall and I didn't take the finals. The night of the Finals I skipped it.

MN: Did you get scared of the test? (laugh)

RP: (laugh) Well no, he was pressed for time because we had lost a couple of classes because of snow storms. We were getting to the end and he only had, we had our class on Monday night, and he had to move the final exam to the next night and he gave us a whole bunch of stuff. He was wrattling off this stuff out of his head, I'm taking a lot of notes, but I'm sure, ya know, at this age, it doesn't penetrate like it does when you're young. You don't memorize like you did when you were young. In order to memorize, I had to type it out and keep reading it over and over. One night, I'll never do it. So I said to heck with it. So I get a lousy mark, so what. So I didn't even show up. When my mark came in I got a B plus. (laugh) Hey, you get a B plus without taking the final thats pretty good.